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DE RUEHLM #0533/01 1351040
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 151040Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9984
INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1187
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 0261
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3834
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1672
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8674
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6909
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4975
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3040
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4934
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4040
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9298
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6604
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1141
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3525
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 73

REF: A) Colombo 529 B) Colombo 522 C) Colombo 519 D) Colombo 514 E)
Colombo 507 F) Colombo 501 G) Colombo 492 H) Colombo 484 I) Colombo
477 J) Colombo 470 K) Colombo 469 and previous

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) headquarters in Geneva raised the alarm concerning an "unimaginable humanitarian disaster" unfolding in the conflict zone, and called on the Government and the LTTE to enable assistance to reach trapped civilians. Roughly 4,000-4,500 civilians escaped across the lagoon west of the "safe zone" on May 14; these civilians are arriving in IDP camps in Vavuniya. Military sources believe the final push against LTTE positions will be concluded within 48 hours. Vijay Nambiar, Chief of Staff for the UN Undersecretary General, will arrive in Sri Lanka on May 16 but will not travel to the "safe zone". It is not certain whether UN Undersecretary General Ban Ki Moon will travel to Sri Lanka. END SUMMARY.

CIVILIANS FLEE THROUGH LAGOON

¶2. (SBU) Army contacts reported about 4,000 civilians had crossed over to government-controlled areas yesterday and last night, May 14 (about 3,500 of them south along the lagoon to 59 Division). In the north, 58 Division advanced about one kilometer south, about as far as the Farah III shipwreck and almost to the ICRC's landing site. There was little change in the front lines of 53 Division, or 59 Division in the south. The Army intends to advance farther today, May 15, and expects to seal off the entire coast today or tomorrow

in order to deny the LTTE Sea Tigers access to the sea and to prevent an LTTE escape. The Army asked if the US had any knowledge of Prabhakaran's whereabouts. Absent any solid information, the Army's assessment is that Prabhakaran is probably still in the NFZ.

¶3. (SBU) According to Air Force UAV coverage, more civilians are coming out of the NFZ on May 15, mostly south along the lagoon. Some are crossing in small boats, some clinging to inflated tires. A contact in the Sri Lankan Air Force said reconnaissance aircraft observed the LTTE lighting fires. The AF assessment was that the Tigers were destroying equipment the LTTE did not want to fall into Army hands.

¶4. (SBU) A UN contact said the Army reported a huge explosion inside the "safe zone" last night, May 15. (The Sri Lankan Air Force also attributes this to the LTTE destroying equipment.) He reported that the LTTE has been employing more suicide bombers against the Army advance.

¶5. (SBU) At 11:15 on May 14, another Air Force contact said the intent of the current operations is for 58 Division from the north and 59 Division from the south to link up. Their mission is to seal off the coast, so the units are concentrating on capturing beachfront areas, rather than a broad advance through the "safe zone". As of 11:30, a Navy contact reported that the Army has already successfully sealed off the beach. Post is attempting to confirm this.

ICRC WARNS OF "DISASTER"

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¶6. (SBU) Following another failed attempt to assist the trapped population on May 14, the International Committee of the Red Cross issued a statement saying they could no longer reach the population. Geneva-based ICRC Head of Operations Pierre Kraehenbuehl stated, "Our staff are witnessing an unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe... Despite high-level assurances, the lack of security on the ground means that our sea operations continue to be stalled, and this is unacceptable. No humanitarian organization can help them in the current circumstances. People are left to their own devices."

¶7. (U) News reports indicate that the makeshift hospital within the "safe zone" is no longer functioning, as the few remaining doctors have left or are leaving the safe zone. There is no remaining health care available to the trapped population, and all food and medical supplies are believed to be exhausted.

UN CHIEF OF STAFF VISIT

¶8. (SBU) UN Chief of Staff to the Secretary General Vijay Nambiar will arrive in Sri Lanka on May 16 and will meet with senior Government officials including the President, Foreign Minister, and Defense Secretary before departing on Tuesday, May 19. According to Acting UN Resident Coordinator Amin Awad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the UN that a visit to the "safe zone" itself was "out of the question." The Government offered the option of a helicopter flight close to the safe zone, or a trip by boat offshore, both of which the UN declined. Nambiar does not plan to travel to IDP camps in Vavuniya. According to Awad, whether or not Undersecretary General Ban Ki Moon will subsequently travel to Sri Lanka hinges on the outcome of the Nambiar visit, and specifically on whether the Government will be able to offer any deliverables that would make a visit worthwhile.

IDP STATISTICS

¶9. (U) The International Organization for Migration reports that 4,500 civilians crossed into Government-controlled territory on May 14. The IDPs passed through the Omanthai screening point; the Government sent approximately 2,500 IDPs to Suduwendrapilaw, Vavuniya District and the remaining IDPs to Zone 2 of Manik Farms

camp.

¶10. (U) From late October until May 13, more than 198,000 IDPs had moved from the conflict zone into Government-controlled territory, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Of the total, nearly 196,000 IDPs were residing in 43 temporary shelters in Jaffna, Mannar, Trincomalee, and Vavuniya districts.

MOORE